A New Study of Jane Austen The three great female novelists of England are once more made the subjects of thoughtful and sympathetic appreciation in a volume of some five hundred pages entitled *Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot and Jane Austen," by Henry H. Bonnell (Long-

mans). The keynote of the essays is struck in their respective sub-titles: thus the estimate of Charlotte Brontë is described as "A Study of Passion;" that of George Eliot as "The Literature of Power and the Cup of Strength," and that of Jane Austen as "The Exquisite Touch." As regards the two former essays, we must commend the reader to the book itself, merely remarking that they deserve careful perusal on the score both of substance and of form. Papers on Jane Austen are much less numerous, and for that reason we shall only glance to-day at some of Mr. Bonnell's observations on the author of "Pride and Prejudice." The sub-title of the essay prepares us, as we have said, for the critic's point of view, who, indeed, is justified by the novelist herself in describing her as a miniature painter. In a letter to a nephew, from which Mr. Bonnell quotes, she contrasts his "strong, manly, vigorous sketches, full of variety and glow" with her own performance on the "little bit, two inches wide, of ivory, on which I work with so fine a brush as produces little effect after much labor.' Keeping in view Miss Austen's intention, which was to paint, not on a large canvas, but in miniature, we must recognize with the author of the book before us that it is the business of a discriminating criticism to distinguish between positive faults and those omissions which are incidental to a given method of treatment, nay inseparable from it. We have no right to expect large treatment and discursive delineation from a hand the forte of which is to make the utmost of "two inches wide of ivory." Mr. Bonnell proceeds to point out some of the omissions which were unavoidable if the novelist was to adhere to her primary purpose, and, by way of introduction, he suggests that much of the failure properly to measure Miss Austen's work has been due to a misapprehension of the conditions of miniature painting. The con-

fineness of execution. It is pointed out

advantages.

consequences which, as Mr. Bonnell shows, would naturally flow from Miss Austen's deliberate adoption of miniature painting. Having before him the definite object of a portrait, the miniaturist has, by reason of his reduced scale, no room for extraneous matter. There is no margin for padding: no superfluous dramatis persona are admissible. Character must be disclosed and accentuated with as little outside help as possible. In no other style of work is nicety of expression and delicacy of detail I dare say thrifty enough, had spared time so indispensable as in miniature painting; nor is there any other in which the least failure is so noticeable. "There are," Mr. Bonnell reminds us. "many world-famous pictures of the heroic size which have for centuries ranked among the wonders of the world, but which, in certain small particulars may be subjected to unfavorable criticism; the grandeur of the general execution smothers the faults in the largeness interesting suggestions. "One cannot well of the canvas. But, in the 'exquisit tough' there is no escape in size, and a minor instantly becomes a major fault. Miss Austen almost never erred in this essential." Touching the absence of supernumeraries, our author admits that one might say at the first glance that there is a sister or two too many in some of the novels, but he thinks that further consideration will exhibit a reason for each. Miss Austen was there goly alive to the narrowness of the boundaries within which she could work successfully. To the suggestion that, she should attempt the delineation of a c'ergyman of high culture, she replied that it was beyond her power: "A classical education, or at any rate, a very extensive acquaintance with English literature, ancient and modern, appears to me quite indispensable for the person who would do any justice to your elergyman; and I think I may safely boast myself to be, with all possible vanity, the most unlearned and uninformed female who ever dared to be an authoress." From a power of selfrestraint revealing so clear a perception of boundaries, it might be predicted that within the boundaries the work would be critically excellent. We should, at all events, expect to find chastened expression, an eschewal of exaggeration and a lively sense of proportion. No reader of Miss Austen's is likely to dispute Mr. Fornell's dictum that she is "The proë ninent mistress of taste. If order is heaven's first law, this lady must rank among the hierarchs of art. for in no other author is to be found a nicer perception of congruous beauty, and a keener discernment of symmetry."

It goes without saying that we should not look to miniaturists for landscape painting. As our author says, there were no artistic portrayers of scenery in Miss Austen's day. Miss Burney, for instance, never introduced landscapes. But even if Miss Austen had been qualified to rise above her age in this respect, her theory of art would have forbidden her to interrupt her tale with descriptions of scenery. Owing, also, to the contraction of her scale, she had no space for mooting and solving social or ethical problems, as George Eliot was disposed to do. It is manifest, likewise, that comedy alone is a fit theme for the miniaturist; he has not scope enough for tragedy. That this was plain to Miss Austen is evident from the fact that there is not a death in all her fiction. There is no room either for a broad exhibition of the here are meant to serve as a general illusvarious classes in society, such as Fielding tration. "How many classes are there in gives us; the author of "Sense and Sensibility" never draws a servant. She knows that it is unnecessary to go out of one's own class in search of vulgarities.

In spite of the smallness of her scale and of its effect upon her aim and methods, her novels cannot fairly be stigmatized as provincial. As Mr. Bonnell points out, it is not the narrowness of the scene which produces provincialism in literature, but the spirit by which the painter of the scene is controlled. Nobody, for instance, would call "Middlemarch" provincial, although it is a study of a provincial community. Miss Austen is safeguarded from provincialism by her penetration and her sense of humor. By virtue of these qualities of any sort. I was pleased to flid they she manages to catch and hold the typical all 'touched their hats'-as, may I be alin the network of the parochial. That is why she is at once old-fashioned and yet modern. When we recall how sequestered was the sphere she lived in, we can scarcely for what is below one, and 'everence for describe her as a woman of the world oneself. But generations age they silently reached the same conclusion, and have not though she, like Thackerny, may be taxed

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and Lamia and Veronica, amid the venerable scenes that still exist in England and are discoverable. "I trust it is thoroughly understood," said Lamia on the eve of the journey, which was to be made by horse and wagon in the month of September. "that I shall be taken nowhere, see nothing, and converse with nobody, that is not ancient. I wish to see Old England, or so much of it as is left." This indicates the plan which, of course, took its form strictly ception of a miniature calls, not only for a in deference to Lamia's wishes. She adreduced scale, but also for exceptional mitted the interest and the educational value of new things, but she stipulated not the that one effect of a rigorous subjection to a less for an itinerary that should not include limitation of space is this, that the selftubular bridges and motor cars and wonders restraint incessantly required is likely to of the sort. Her particular craving was "for the urbanity of the Past, for feminine serviceableness, for washing days, homemade jams, lavender bags, recitation of miniature painting, therefore, involves not Gray's 'Elegy,' and morning and evening prayers." She insisted upon old inns, and old people, and the most out-of-fashion

siffe enthusiasm: on the other hand, as enthusiasm is apt to destroy perspective, the restraint has a tendency to heighten the value of the art. The contracted scale of only disadvantages, but countervailing ideas. Presumably, the journey left her Let us note more in detail some of the with no complaint to make. "We seemed," says the chronicle, "to have got beyond the range of corrugated iron farmsheds and barbed wire. There were generous breadths of grass on either side between the roadway and the hedges. The latter were allowed to have some little will and way of their own, the cottages stood well back from highway or lane, looked solid, sturdy and weather tight, though of vague antiquity; and the folk inside them, though to cultivate unremunerative flowers, and money enough to invest in white paint and

muslin curtains, so as to give to their windows, above and below, a look of comeliness and care." Fleasant scenes, indeed; scenes calculated to make us wish that all the world might have the peace and rest and sufficiency indicated. Our author goes on to other England with one's eyes open trive about without observing indication after indication of the strong individuality of the English character, which may yet prove our best safeguard against that exotic 'collectivism' of which we hear so much. The very landscape, its shapeless fields, its

irregular hedgerows, its winding and wayward roads, its accidental copses, its arbitrariness of form and feature, are a silent but living protest against uniformity and preconceived or mechanical views of life. Who divided these fields? Who marked out these roads? No one did. They divided and marked out themselves, just as strong characters divide and sever themselves from others, settle their own boundaries and define irregularly their own place and position. A square field you will no more find in an English landscape than a round one. They are all informal, swerving and sweeping in and out in a manner unaccountable, which endows each of them with life and a kind of personality. The very lanes meander and zigzag so you might almost

think their course had been decided by the

steps of some of our deeply drinking Saxon

ancestors, whose legs were more or less unsteady as they wended homeward after a day's thatching or threshing." It is true enough that outside of some of the regulation novels the life of England is sufficiently varied. They say "By gosh" in parts of England, the same as they do in Boston, though neither in Eoston nor London would this be generally believed. Plenty of Englishmen never suspect that the Yankees talk exceedingly pure English. "Why," says the author of this book, "should Sussex be utterly unlike Kent? I will answer the question when any one tells me why one Englishman is unlike any other Englishman. We are hewn, not sawn, and no Consular Director with a Code has decreed that we shall be this or do that, or that our dear old haphazard land shall be divided into departments." In the land and in the people the same irregularity is to be observed. "That everything in English country life is a growth, not a mechanism. may be seen again in the diversity of aspect worn by its various counties. An accurate observer of nature ought to be able to tell, within a day or two, without any calendar to help him, what day of the year it is; and he will equally be able to surmise what

county of England he is in without the aid of map or guide book." Kent and Sussex England? I do not know. Attempt to define them and you will find yourself in a difficulty. I almost think there are as many classes as men, and certainly there are as many classes as counties. Passing from Kent to Sussex is like passing from one society to another. Kent is softer-I do not mean in climate, but in aspect-more refined, more careful of itself, a little more self-conscious; in a word, more civilized. Sussex once had its iron works, as its hammer ponds to this day testify, but these have disappeared, and Sussex seems well pleased to have got rid of them. There is a rooted rusticity in Sussex folk, which would ill accord with manufacture

lowed to say, why should they not? They

never heard of Goethe's three reverences

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vet abandoned it. I know there are parts of England where 'touching the hat' would ad any existence for the other. If proudly

now be regarded as a trait of servility. In the name of the sweet charities of life, why? I imagine every well-mannered member of the House of Commons takes his hat off to the Speaker when he meets him, and calls him 'Sir.' It is painful to me to pass a fellow creature in a country lane, or, for that matter, on a high road, and ass and be passed by him as though neither gnoring each other be a proof of independence, I prefer a little sweet servility. The journeying company saw many pleasant and restful things. They all commented, as pleasantly and restfully Continued on Tenth Page

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